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Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty

DIONYSUS AND
ŚIVA: PARALLEL
PATTERNS IN TWO
PAIRS OF MYTHS

That Śiva and Dionysus bear a striking resemblance to one another has been known for a long time. The ancient Greeks noticed it, referring to Śiva as the Indian Dionysus, on the one hand,¹ and to Dionysus as the god from the Orient, on the other.² (The ancient Indians, with characteristic chauvinism, disdained to comment on the resemblance, if in fact they recognized it at all.) In recent times, scholars have pointed out numerous significant points of correspondence: wine, ecstasy, the bull, snakes, the mountains, nocturnal rites with drums and dancing, frenzied women, fertility, the imposition of an alien cult upon established orthodoxy, and, finally, the coincidence of opposites.³

As in any case of apparent parallelism, several different explanations are possible: a common original source in prehistory

¹ Strabo *Geography* 15.58, citing Megasthenes' *Indica*; he refers to the god in the mountains (Śiva) as Dionysus and the god in the plains (Kṛṣṇa) as Heracles; cf. also the peculiarly Indian episodes in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca*.

² Euripides, *Bacchae*, ed. with an introduction and commentary by E. R. Dodds, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 1–22.

³ Willibald Kirfel, "Śiva und Dionysus," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 78 (1953): 83–90; J. Bruce Long, "Śiva and Dionysos: Visions of Terror and Bliss," *Numen* 18 (1971): 180–209. Two other valuable studies of Dionysus, besides Dodds's brilliant commentary on the *Bacchae*, are Walter F. Otto's *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1965); and E. R. Dodds's *The Greek and the Irrational* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1951).

(in this case, perhaps a proto-Indo-European source); cross-cultural borrowing during the historical period (Greece from India, or the reverse); or independent origination (a hypothesis that incorporates the assumption of some sort of universal human substratum, of the kind posited by Freud or Jung, out of which the same myth arises independently in different cultures). In the context of these speculations, I propose to examine here in some detail two complex bodies of mythology from Greece and India dealing with each of the gods in a narrative dramatic form. Unlike the congeries of poetic fragments, vase paintings, inscriptions, coins, and descriptions of rituals that have been assembled by previous studies of the two gods, such sustained narratives are susceptible of analysis in terms of patterns of symbolism.⁴

These patterns indicate an underlying network of religious beliefs common to the two cults, a network at once more detailed and more basic than the generally "Dionysian" cluster of attributes recognized by existing scholarship. Whether this deeper continuum indicates cultural borrowing—on the argument that the greater the detail, the greater the likelihood of historical transmission—or independent origination—on the argument that the more basically "human" and integrated the matrix of belief, the more likely a universal basis for it—I am not prepared to say. It might, however, be useful to point out these suggestive parallel patterns, and to examine the degree to which the two traditions are based upon a common theology—despite certain major discrepancies in mood and style—before proceeding with the argument one way or another.

The dramatic sources that I intend to use for the myth of Dionysus are the *Bacchae* of Euripides and *The Frogs* of Aristophanes.⁵ For Śiva, they are the Purāṇic texts narrating a cycle of myths: the incest of Brahmā, the sacrifice of Dakṣa, and the encounter with the sages of the Pine Forest. Among the significant

⁴ Professor Long, in the article cited in n. 3 above, pointed out the general correspondence between the two myths but used it only to show how both gods were represented as outsiders breaking into orthodox religions.

⁵ For the *Bacchae* text, see n. 2 above; for *The Frogs*, see *Aristophanis Comoediae*, ed. F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907), vol. 2. The impetus for this essay came from a seminar on the *Bacchae* and *The Frogs* that I taught with James Redfield in the spring of 1979. I never would have had the ἱερίσις to teach such a course, let alone to publish out of it, had it not been for the encouragement of Redfield. Many of the ideas in this paper have been shaped and trimmed by his tactful criticism and his vastly greater knowledge of the classics; his steadying hand has rescued me from many of my excesses, as I rushed in where real classicists fear to tread; but of course, being a real classicist, he remains rather uneasy about some of my more unorthodox methods and conclusions.

differences between the two bodies of material are the dates of the texts (the Greek being far earlier than the Sanskrit), the uniqueness or multiplicity of the recorded versions (the Sanskrit yielding far more variants of the myth of Śiva than the Greek yields of the myth of Dionysus), the genre (Greek tragedy and comedy in dramatic form, Sanskrit narrative poetry), and the balance between tradition and the artist (the Greek authors being highly individual, the Sanskrit authors anonymous and far more bound by their aesthetic and dramatic canons). The *Bacchae* and *The Frogs* depict apparently unrelated episodes, expanding in different ways, and in different tones, upon certain shared themes. The Indian texts seem at first to supply separate episodes in a continuous story; in fact, however, the episodes echo and supplement one another's themes, functioning as multiple versions of a single story, much as the two Greek texts do. But where the symbolic pattern of the myth is concentrated in each (and both) of the Greek plays, it is distributed by the Sanskrit texts into different episodes in a single text and different versions of several texts.⁶

Not surprisingly, the differences in form are matched by equally significant differences in the conceptual content of the two traditions: the myths of Dionysus make certain points that are not made in the myths of Śiva, and the reverse. The two myths revolve around different family triads: Pentheus, his mother Agaue, and the god Dionysus in the Greek;⁷ Dakṣa, his daughter Satī, and the god Śiva in the Sanskrit. The two stories end in very different moods: death and mourning in the Greek, restoration and celebration in the Sanskrit. Yet, despite these variations, the myths of Dionysus and Śiva reveal a point-by-point correspondence that must make us speculate on what it is that both of them are saying.

I will begin with a summary of the stories of the *Bacchae* and *The Frogs* and an analysis of the symbolic patterns of the two plays; then a summary of the cycle of myths about Śiva, with an analysis of their corresponding patterns; and, finally, I will review the congruencies and speculate upon their significance. The summaries will, of necessity, omit much that is in fact central

⁶ For a discussion of the need for such a distribution of motifs in several versions, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Śiva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 16–18 (hereafter cited as *Asceticism and Eroticism*), citing Edmund R. Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (New York: Viking Press, 1970), pp. 59, 70.

⁷ The justification of including Dionysus in this family triad will be discussed at length below.

to the plays but not essential to the points that I wish to make here.

DIONYSUS IN THE *Bacchae* AND *The Frogs*

SUMMMARY OF THE *Bacchae*

Semele, the daughter of Cadmus, had given birth to Dionysus, whose father, she said, was Zeus. Her sisters denied this story and, hence, denied the divinity of Dionysus. Semele had died, struck by a thunderbolt, when Dionysus was born. Agaue, another daughter of Cadmus, had married Echion, one of the dragon brood sown by Cadmus, and given birth to Pentheus. Pentheus, now king of Thebes, denied Dionysus and forbade his worship in Thebes, but Dionysus came to Thebes disguised as a mortal and inspired the daughters of Cadmus to worship him, dancing in ecstasy on the mountains. When Pentheus opposed Dionysus, attempting to imprison him, mocking him for his effeminate dress, and insinuating that the mountain dances were orgies, Dionysus mesmerized Pentheus, enticing him to spy upon the women and to wear the Bacchic women's costume himself. In their frenzy, the women, led by Agaue, tore Pentheus to pieces, and Agaue carried back his head, still believing that it was the head of a lion. As Cadmus brought her to her senses, she realized what she had done and accepted Dionysus's sentence: that she and her sisters should wander in exile from Thebes. Dionysus changed Cadmus and his wife into serpents.

SUMMARY OF *The Frogs*

Dionysus and his servant journeyed to Hades to bring back a poet to help save Athens in her time of need. Disguised at first as Heracles, Dionysus then decided to change places with his servant to avoid receiving the punishment meant for Heracles; later, they switched back again. In the mounting confusion, the denizens of hell decided to torture both of them in order to determine which of them was the god Dionysus, as Dionysus now claimed to be. When this failed to clarify the issue, it was decided that Pluto and Persephone should judge the case. Later, there was a contest between Euripides, Sophocles, and Aeschylus to determine which was the best dramatist and, hence, which one should be brought back to Athens. Dionysus chose Aeschylus and returned to Athens with him.

ANALYSIS OF THE TWO PLAYS

ANALYSIS OF THE *Bacchae*

The symbolic structure of the *Bacchae* turns upon the conflict between Pentheus and Dionysus. Pentheus is a mortal who does not understand what it is to be mortal; he does not know how he differs from the gods nor how his birth and life are inextricably caught up in the workings of the gods. He is also an animal who does not know what it is to be an animal, to have an animal birth and an animal lust. Dionysus is a god who at first conceals both his immortality and his animal nature in order ultimately to establish them and to prove that his birth and life are divine. The separate themes of unnatural birth, blurring of male-female boundaries, under- and overrating of blood ties, and relationships with animals (wild/tame, hunted/hunting) are interwoven with increasing complexity as the play develops. The three levels of god, mortal, and animal present intersecting dangers in the form of violated taboos.⁸

The danger of blurring the boundary between man and god is viewed on several different levels. It is *ὑβρις* for a mortal to think he is a god. The chorus warns Pentheus that anyone who thinks "non-mortal thoughts" will have a short (i.e., very mortal) life (line 369); these "non-mortal thoughts" (*τό τε μὴ θνητὰ φρονεῖν*) imply the arrogance of thinking oneself a god (a theme often encountered in Greek tragedy). But they also imply the arrogance of forgetting that you are an animal (denying your own animal passions, the carnality that links you to the mortality of animals) and, on the other hand, the danger of thinking "sub-mortal" thoughts, of allowing yourself to be entirely engulfed by the irrational power of bestiality. Neither of these two animal pitfalls is avoided by Pentheus, who smugly disdains the lust that he falsely imputes to the *Bacchae* and expresses repugnance for them, while, on the other hand, he is quickly unmasked and overpowered by his own prurience and eagerness to witness their nocturnal orgies.

It is also *ὑβρις* for a mortal to mistake a god for a mortal. If Pentheus wants to fight with a god (*θεομαχεῖν*), as he is repeatedly accused of doing, Dionysus will even the odds by changing him from a mortal not into a god, but into an animal; and this is what

⁸ It is interesting, and probably relevant, to note that these are precisely the three acts grouped together by Plato in his discussion of the taboos violated by the dreaming soul: intercourse with one's mother or with any other mortal or god or animal (*Republic* 571D).

he does. Finally, to be a man is defined not only as being a nongod and a nonanimal, but as being a nonfemale; this, too, is a distinction that Pentheus must learn the hard way, by being driven into a state of androgyny even as he is driven to be a man-animal and tricked into revealing his aspirations to be a man-god: Pentheus misunderstands the blurring of male-female boundaries in the god (teasing Dionysus for his effeminacy) and is made to experience it in himself, when Dionysus dresses him in women's clothing.

To realize one's nature is to realize one's birth, and the theme of supernatural birth (and androgynous birth) forms yet another spoke of the wheel of the *Bacchae*, fanning out beside the themes of mortal/immortal nature, human/animal nature, and male/female nature. To realize one's birth is to realize who one's parents are and what one's relationship with them is. For Pentheus, this involves an acceptance of his animal father, Echion, and a revelation of his strange relationship with his human mother. For Dionysus, it is a vindication of his human mother and a revelation of his immortal father. The final aspect of the relationship between gods and mortals is the illumination of the relationship of one's parents with one another, of the relationships between Semele and Zeus, on the one hand, and between Agaue and Echion—but also between Agaue and Dionysus. For the quintessential relationship between mortals and gods—particularly with highly sexual gods—is theogamy, intimate sexual contact with the god, which is the tragic undoing of both Semele and Agaue.

Semele and Agaue are both daughters of Cadmus, and both have nonmortal lovers. Semele has a god for a lover, which places her in a no-win situation: she is said to have been killed either because her lover was in fact immortal (so that she was struck down by Zeus to pacify jealous Hera [8–9]) or because she falsely claimed to have had an immortal lover (so that Zeus killed her for slandering him, as her sisters claimed [32–34]). Though Semele's claim to have had Zeus for her lover is voiced repeatedly and is implicit in the equally recurrent epithet given to Dionysus, “son of Zeus,” it is also shadowed with doubt on several occasions. It is challenged when first stated (28–30) and implicitly doubted even by the well-meaning Cadmus when he suggests that it might prove a “useful lie” to have a god in the family (333–37), a lie which sticks in his throat when the god “born in the family” finally destroys them all (1250).

Upon the question of whether or not Semele slept with Zeus hangs the question of whether Dionysus is a god; this is stated

explicitly by Dionysus, Cadmus, and several other characters in the play. The question of the divinity of Dionysus lends great irony to Dionysus's final justification of his merciless vengeance. When Cadmus says that, since Dionysus is a god, he should not have indulged in a human's wrath, Dionysus turns the argument inside out: he disclaims any responsibility for the tragic effects of his vengeance by saying that Zeus is his father (i.e., that he himself is immortal), and that, being a god, Zeus had the power to make all these events take place by ordaining them all long ago (1348–49).

What is the nature of Zeus's supernatural fatherhood of Dionysus? It is, first of all, destructive. The first hint is of destruction to Semele rather than to Dionysus, and from Hera rather than from Zeus: Hera (the wife of Zeus and hence the stepmother of Dionysus) first is implicated in the death of Semele at the birth of Dionysus (9) and then is accused of having attempted to kill Dionysus (289–90). But the actual instrument of Semele's death is the thunderbolt of Zeus, eventually transferred to Dionysus himself, who touches his mother's tomb with fire (623–24) as Zeus had done (8), and then sends a thunderbolt at the moment of Pentheus's destruction (1082).

The danger in Dionysus's birth is associated with its androgyny: Zeus is his mother. The story of Dionysus's birth from Zeus's thigh is told twice by the chorus, who refer to the "womb of a man" (*ἄρσενά . . . νηδύν*), which is the thigh (*μηρός*) of Zeus (523–28; cf. 94–99). This is one of a number of "thigh-births" from male gods in the Indo-European corpus,⁹ including, as we shall see, the birth of various gods from Brahmā, the Indian counterpart of Zeus as father of the gods. Even in the *Bacchae*, the story of Dionysus's androgynous birth from Zeus is supported by several allusions to the birth of Zeus himself from Rhea under similar circumstances (60, 122, 130); Kronos swallows his children as Zeus places Dionysus inside his thigh, only to have them born out of him.

The story of Dionysus's birth from the thigh of Zeus is challenged by Pentheus, prompting Teiresias to offer yet another version of the abnormal birth: Zeus (again, to escape Hera) made a substitute Dionysus out of a piece (*μέρος*) or air and made it a hostage

⁹ Several instances are cited in Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 334–35 (hereafter cited as *Origins of Evil*); and *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 226–27, 308, 322 (hereafter cited as *Women, Androgynes*).

(ὠμῆρευσε) for Hera (242, 286–97). This, again, is used to emphasize the fact that Dionysus really is a god, born of a god, and, moreover, that he was a god fighting against a goddess (θεῖν θεός), a point cited in his favor and in vivid contrast with the accusation made against Pentheus, that he is a mortal fighting against a god.

Despite the awkward etymology based on the triple pun on “thigh,” “piece,” and “hostage,” and the lesser awkwardness of having two myths to explain the same thing, this last variant of the birth story sets the scene for the important theme of the substitute victim: Dionysus in this story has a substitute made of air, but in the usual Dionysian rituals the substitute for the god is the beast torn apart in the *σπαραγμός*, and in the course of the play it will be Pentheus himself, to whom this story of the “piece of air” is now being told. The foreshadowing of this event is balanced by yet another substitution that has already taken place in the past, for in the androgynous birth of Zeus a stone was substituted by Rhea for Kronos to swallow in place of Zeus.¹⁰

The birth of Pentheus is in many ways an inversion of the birth of Dionysus. Semele and Agaue are sisters, and as Dionysus’s birth was the death of his mother, so Pentheus’s mother will be the death of him. Echion, the counterpart of Zeus, is, like Dionysus, closely associated with serpents (507, 1025) and born without female agency. Pentheus ignores his serpentine birth, except on two striking occasions: when Dionysus points out that Pentheus does not know how he is living, nor what he is doing, nor who he is (οὐκ οἶσθ’ ὅ τι ζῆς, οὐδ’ ὃ δρᾷς, οὐδ’ ὅστις εἰ [506]), Pentheus retorts with an unthinking innocence that bears the weight of great irony: he parrots the conventional formula (“I am Pentheus, son of Agaue and my father Echion”), not knowing that the fact that Agaue is his mother will doom him to a ghastly death, and the fact that Echion is his father has given him a bestial nature that he does not understand and so cannot deal with, one that will also become literally real to him in his death, when his mother mistakes him for a beast. And in his final desperation, Pentheus tries to use that same formula to make his mother recognize who he is when she is tearing him limb from limb: “Mother, I am Pentheus, your son that you bore to Echion” (1119). Later still, Cadmus invokes Echion’s name to wake Agaue out of her madness to the terrible realization of what she has done (1274–76). Thus Pentheus’s

¹⁰ The theme of substitutes and of beasts as substitutes for children appears also in the scene in which the Bacchae suckle fawns and young wolves.

beast-nature is dependent upon his mortal birth and is a direct cause of his fight with the god.

Pentheus and Dionysus are mirror images of sexuality, particularly in their relationships with their mothers. Pentheus falsely accuses Semele of lying about her sex life (245), just as he repeatedly drops innuendos about the lust of the Bacchae (225) and about Dionysus himself (237–39, 354, 454–58). Of all the Bacchae, Agaue is by far the most important to him; he talks about her constantly, both as his own mother (whose unseemly, unmaternal frenzy appalls him) and as the most important woman in Thebes (whose undignified behavior Pentheus regards with the same priggish disapproval that he applies to Cadmus and Teiresias, dirty old men who ought to know better than to act as they do, in Pentheus's eyes). Agaue is the one of the Bacchae who murders him and who perhaps even eats him (1184),¹¹ two classical and widespread fantasies of the projection of a son's ambivalent erotic attachment to this mother.¹² Pentheus sees Agaue as the quintessential maenad and Dionysus as the seducer; the implication is that Pentheus views Dionysus as the lover of Agaue.

Pentheus's own guilty lechery is cunningly drawn out by Dionysus. Along with the lust that he projects from himself onto Dionysus, Pentheus draws to himself a number of Dionysus's qualities. He mocks Dionysus for his woman's clothing and long hair and then is made to wear them himself; Dionysus then mocks Pentheus, though Pentheus does not catch the irony (455, 493, 830, 926–32). When, at the moment of his death, Pentheus breaks out of the spell, he tears the wig off his head in hope of making his mother recognize him (1115–16), but his hair continues to convince his mother that he is a wild beast (1199). The hair is simultaneously the sign of a woman and the sign of an animal—as well as the sign of the ecstatic androgynous god.

This symbolism links the change in sexual roles (Pentheus shifting from moralizer to participant, and from man to woman) to a parallel change in animal roles. The hunter becomes the hunted; Pentheus threatens to behead Dionysus (241) and is

¹¹ Though this is a rather extreme form of the argument, I am pleased to note that Dodds accepts it: "We may find here a hint of a tradition in which *ὑμωπαγία* as well as *σπαργμός* was practised on Pentheus. Cf. Oppian, *Cyn.* 4. 304, where P. is transformed into a bull, the maenads into panthers who rend and eat the bull; also the daughters of Minyas who tore and ate the child of one of them (Plut. *Q. Gr.* 38), and the cannibal feast prescribed by the god himself in a fragment of a late Dionysiac epic (Page, *Literary Papyri* i, no. 134)" (Dodds, ed., *Bacchae*, p. 224).

¹² See O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 190–202, for a discussion of other Greek myths on this theme and their relationship to the myth of Pentheus.

himself beheaded. Pentheus hunts the “bestial” Bacchae and the “bestial” god (227, 434, 870, 1019, etc.), but Dionysus hunts Pentheus (846) and is praised by the triumphant Bacchae for his hunting (1190–92). Dionysus is accused by Pentheus of “hunting” Aphrodite (458), and the witness of the Bacchic rites uses this same phrase in denying that the Bacchae were lustful (688); thus, the themes of Pentheus’s projected lust and the hunter hunted merge with the theme of the false accusation of the god and the women. This combination also appears in Agaue’s naive wish that her son will go hunting instead of fighting against the god (1255), an irony in the light of the fact that Pentheus fights the god by hunting him. So, too, the godless Akteon is doomed to a *σπαράγμος* foreshadowing Pentheus’s when he simultaneously challenges the goddess and hunts too much (338–40).

Central to the image of hunting is the figure of the hound. When Pentheus hunts Agaue (721, 731), the Bacchae turn into hounds (731, 978) and hunt their enemies; this is the pivotal point of the reversal of hunter and hunted. The final irony comes when Agaue, on the very point of realizing what she has done, blames the hunters for her mistaken belief that the head she holds is the head of a lion, not the head of Pentheus (1278). A similar reversal of animal roles may be seen in the image of the snake. At first, the snake is associated with Dionysus and the Bacchae: Dionysus himself is a snake (1016) and has snakes on his head (102), as do the Bacchae, who also have snakes holding up their garments (697) and licking away the blood of the cattle they devour (767). Thus, when Dionysus turns Cadmus into a serpent he is making him, like Pentheus, become a creature who is at once a form of the god and a form of the mortal’s true nature—a throwback to the dragon breed of Echion that Cadmus produced.

In the final scenes of the play, the lion and the bull are used, like the serpent, in symbolic contexts that further blur the line between god and mortal in an ominous way. Agaue’s gruesome pleasure in disemboweling and beheading Pentheus is made possible by her persistent delusion that he is a lion or, more pointedly, the offspring of a lion (1142, 1173, 1185, 1195, 1212, 1278). That Pentheus himself is a lion is an aspect of the emergence of his suppressed animal nature; that he is the child of a lion reflects once again upon the motif of the mortal who is caught between a father who is a god and a father who is an animal—Zeus in the case of Dionysus and Echion in the case of Pentheus.

But Pentheus is not merely the child of a lion; he is the child of

a lioness: Agaue is a wild beast. Although she is not specially singled out for images of bestiality, she is the leader of the Bacchae, who are mothers to both fawns and ferocious wolves (700). Moreover, the Bacchae suckle these animals because they have abandoned their own human children (699), the telltale act of the evil mother; Agaue not only abandons Dionysus but murders him, in an inversion of the nurturing behavior of the wild beast who adopts an abandoned human child.¹³

This treatment of Pentheus is all the more bitter because of the way in which Dionysus has previously infantilized Pentheus: he dresses him up, as a mother dresses a daughter. At that moment, Pentheus is reminded of Agaue: he hopes he looks like her when he is dressed up (926) and he wants his mother to bring him home (966), as a small child might ask. Dionysus sardonically assures him that he will come home in the hands of his mother (969), an image reinvoked when the chorus speak of the joy of holding in your hands your child—streaming with blood (1164). When Agaue mistakes her child for a wild beast, therefore, the themes of the ambivalent mother and the ambivalent god converge in the question of precisely what sort of animal she is, and he is, and the child is.

Pentheus is not a lion; this is what makes the dismemberment so appalling. Dionysus, however, is a lion (1017), though Pentheus does not realize it. The symbolic pattern of the image of the lion perfectly balances that of the bull: Dionysus is called a lion only once (in the same phrase that calls him a bull and a snake), while Pentheus is mistaken for a lion many times; by contrast, Dionysus is called a bull many times, Pentheus only once. Dionysus is described as having the horns of a bull at the same time as he is said to have been born from Zeus (101). When Pentheus hunts Dionysus in the stable, the god appears as a bull (619) and then immediately provides yet another substitute for himself, made out of air (630). The bull thus conjures up the image of a substitute for a sacrificial victim, in this case Dionysus (whose substitute was made out of air to fool Hera [630]). When the Bacchae devour their god, they devour him in this form; so, too, the bull is a substitute for the hunters who would hunt the Bacchae: the Bacchae turn and hunt them, becoming hounds to devour not the men but the bulls (743–47). When Pentheus is bewitched, again he sees Dionysus as a bull, and Dionysus assures

¹³ Ibid., pp. 149–90, 241–52; another example of the evil mother in the *Bacchae* is Hera, who attempts to kill Dionysus.

him that this is his true form (920–24). Again Dionysus reveals himself as a dangerous bull (1016), and as a bull he leads Pentheus to his doom (1159). When Pentheus then appears as the final bull in the play, he takes the place of the god in symbol as well as in ritual for the last time, as his mother fondles his severed head (1185) and thinks of him as her calf. Pentheus is thus revealed as descended from a snake and transformed into a lion and a bull—the three simultaneous theriomorphic forms of the god whose existence he has so foolishly denied and who has made him the ultimate human substitute for his own *σπαργμός*.

ANALYSIS OF *The Frogs*

In plot as well as in symbolism, *The Frogs* resembles the *Bacchae*. Dionysus journeys to a strange land (Hades in *The Frogs*, Greece [from his native Asia] in the *Bacchae*); he changes clothes and roles with a mortal servant; he is physically maltreated (imprisoned in the *Bacchae*, beaten in *The Frogs*). This is the turning point, after which he himself takes command, judges others (Pentheus or the tragic poets), and emerges triumphant. Other aspects of the plots are mirror images: Dionysus, falsely accused of lechery in the tragedy, is hilariously lecherous in the comedy; and in the end, where he exiles the survivors of the *Bacchae* from Thebes, he leads back to Athens the poet in *The Frogs* who had been exiled in Hades.¹⁴

The main theme of *The Frogs* that links it to the *Bacchae* is the debate about whether or not Dionysus is a god. The question is first raised by Dionysus himself, who refers to himself at the beginning of the play with what sounds as if it is going to be his traditional patronymic epithet, “I am Dionysus, son of ———,” but then breaks off and substitutes for the expected “Zeus” the self-mocking “Wine-jar” (22). Shortly thereafter, Dionysus asks

¹⁴ It would be convenient to be able to say that Aristophanes consciously satirizes the *Bacchae* of Euripides, but although this is possible, it is by no means certain. *The Frogs* was performed in 406 B.C.; the *Bacchae* was found among Euripides’ papers after his death in the winter of 407–406. It is clear from the content of *The Frogs*, as well as from other sources, that Aristophanes hated Euripides and would perhaps have jumped at an opportunity to make fun of his last work; it is also a suggestive coincidence that the two plays were composed and performed during the same brief period of time. In any case, Aristophanes does satirize other plays of Euripides, including another one apparently about Dionysus (*The Frogs* 1211–13), but he never quotes a single line from the *Bacchae*. In the absence of more solid evidence, it is perhaps best to proceed with caution, treating the two plays as two different approaches to the same god, not necessarily aware of one another. I am indebted to David Grene for his advice on the point as well as for general background information on Greek drama and for his painstaking reading of several early drafts of this essay.

Heracles the quickest way to Hades (122), a question traditionally answered with ritual instructions, cosmic maps, and warnings; here it is literal-mindedly answered by Heracles with the advice that Dionysus should kill himself (by hanging, poison, jumping from a height, etc.). Dionysus's objection to this is not the fact that, as a god, he cannot die, but rather that he would prefer to avoid such discomfort; the (wrongly) supposed inability of gods to suffer discomfort later in the play becomes the criterion by which the god is to be distinguished from the mortal.

Once Dionysus reaches Hades, he is treated at first more like a god than like a mortal, in passages similar to those found in the *Bacchae*: the frogs praise Dionysus the son of Zeus (215) in a satire on a Bacchic chorus. In the *Bacchae*, Dionysus appears disguised as his own priest; in *The Frogs*, when he is temporarily out of control (as he had only seemed to be in the *Bacchae*), he calls out to his priest (in the audience) to save him (297). Thus the same figure—the priest of Dionysus—carries a very different weight in the two plays. So too, Pentheus does not know that the “stranger” before whom he maligns the “absent” Dionysus is in fact Dionysus himself; in *The Frogs*, the Bacchic chorus does not know that the figure standing before them is Dionysus, and so they call out to the god whom they think to be absent (325).

But the question of Dionysus's immortality becomes explicit when he changes clothes with his servant, Xanthias, and then turns around and reminds Xanthias that he (Xanthias) is a mere mortal (and a slave) and so should not presume to impersonate a god (530). This distinction between Dionysus and Xanthias is thrown right back at Dionysus when Xanthias repeats it, word for word, as a reason why he refuses to go on with the masquerade (which is beginning to be dangerous for the one impersonating the god [583–84]). The next twist comes when Dionysus tries to avoid being tortured by claiming that he is a god (628–31), presumably exempt on the grounds of sanctity as the free man is exempt on the grounds of law: only the slave could be tortured. To this, Xanthias eventually counters with the argument that Dionysus's divinity is a reason to torture him, not to refrain from torturing him, since, being a god, he will not mind it (634).

The paradoxes raised by these logical and theological shenanigans are a comic form of a very serious paradox at the heart of the *Bacchae*. The torture scene in that play is sinister indeed: Pentheus foolishly attempts to do physical violence to Dionysus (actually imprisoning him and threatening to behead him), though Dionysus

warns him that he will be punished for his impiety (490). When Dionysus performs a series of miracles and emerges from the prison, he remarks drily to the amazed Pentheus, "Can't gods step over walls?" (654), and begins to set the grisly trap that he has in mind for him. Why need he take revenge for a torture that never touched him? This paradox is implicit in Cadmus's question at the end: why should a god take revenge like a mortal? The answer is never given in the *Bacchae*, nor in *The Frogs*, where it is channeled into the question of the trial by torture: all seem to agree that the one who does not mind the torture will in fact be the god, but the scene is unresolved: Dionysus masks his cries as poetry or prayer, and the flogger, Aiacus, says that he cannot decide which one is the god (669).

The problem is then transferred into another sphere more easily susceptible of resolution: Aiacus finally suggests that since he knows that Pluto and Persephone are gods, they might decide the more difficult question of the divinity of Dionysus (670). Unfortunately, this sensible idea is never carried through; we never learn what the judgment of Pluto and Persephone was. The second half of the play begins abruptly with another test (the trial of the poets, instead of the trial of Dionysus), in which Dionysus is treated like a god just as if there had never been any question about it. In the first half of the play, Dionysus assumes the role of the ribald buffoon, the *βαυμολόχος*, a stock figure in Greek comedy; in the second half of the play he is abruptly transformed into Dionysus, patron god of Greek tragedy.

The mockery of Dionysus in the first half of the play is, in part, a result of the wholesale utilization of the bag of tricks of the *βαυμολόχος*, but it is also a result of the natural coalescing of the obscenity inherent in that figure and the genuine sexuality and bestiality inherent in Dionysus. Dionysus in the *Bacchae* is wrongly accused, by Pentheus, of being lecherous; he is, in fact, not guilty of the things that Pentheus imagines about him. Dionysus is, however, highly charged with powers of eroticism and fertility, both cosmically (for he is the principle of generation, vegetation, and ecstasy) and psychologically (for his serpentine androgyny, his cruelty, and his lawlessness are sexually compelling). In *The Frogs*, by contrast, Dionysus is merely and thoroughly lecherous: he lusts for a maenad whose breast has become exposed in the dance (410–15); in the *Bacchae*, Pentheus falsely accuses Dionysus of lusting for the *Bacchae*, and then of lusting for him, but they do not; they bare their breasts merely

to suckle wild animals, not to entice men. In *The Frogs*, Dionysus lusts after a dancing girl of a different type, complaining that Xanthias (his alter ego) will take the girl while he (Dionysus) looks on with his penis in his hand (545). This particular form of lechery is, as we shall see, also characteristic of Śiva.

The mockery of Dionysus implicit in these scenes is carried over into several other episodes, satirizing Dionysus's animal instincts (primarily lechery and gluttony). The association of Dionysus with the lion, that carried such sinister overtones in the *Bacchae*, is present throughout *The Frogs* in the form of the lion skin that Dionysus wears in imitation of Heracles, in place of his own usual fawn skin. Along with the lion skin, Dionysus takes on Heracles' reputation for having a monstrous appetite (550), a clear parallel to the horrible appetite of the *Bacchae*: Heracles's garlic and cheese replace the blood and flesh and wine of their cannibalism, which is referred to in *The Frogs* when the chorus mentions the bull eating of the Bacchic rites (357).

The deep relationship between sexuality and eating underlies much of the horror of the *Bacchae*; it is also at the heart of the comedy of *The Frogs*, as indeed of much low comedy the world over. The mockery of Dionysus brings out the animal quality of the god not in a sinister way, as in the *Bacchae*, but in a relaxing and reassuring way: god is, after all, a creature who shits and farts just like every body else, but not *just* like everyone else—Gargantuanly, cosmically, hilariously. Dionysus shits and regards it as a libation for which the god should be called (479); his fart is identified with the frogs' Bacchic chant (255–56); and his anus is where his heart is (482–84). The religious implications of the first two jokes are clear enough, and become clearer still in the context of other mythologies, where god is often said to emit the world through his anus.¹⁵ The trickster farts himself up into a tree and falls into a mountainous pile of his own shit, but the trickster is god.¹⁶ The location of the heart in the anus is, again, on this plane a reflection of the widespread folk belief that the creative center of the deity is not the head but, rather, the anus and genitals.¹⁷ Thus the farting and shitting of Dionysus is brought in not only because it is the staple of all low comedy but also because it has cosmic overtones. It is indeed music-hall stuff, but it is also part

¹⁵ Cf. O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, p. 140; and Alan Dundes, "Earth-Diver: Creation of the Mythopoeic Male," *American Anthropologist* 64 (1962): 1032–1105.

¹⁶ See Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), pp. 25–27.

¹⁷ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 139–40.

of an earthy world view that is not so foreign to the rationalistic and moralistic Greeks as may at first appear.

The laughter of Dionysus has different moods, each adding depth to the others. In *The Frogs* he appears first as the butt of comedy, the βωμολόχος; but even this figure has obscure sacred associations, as his name implies (the “altar-waylayer,” who hung about the altar to scavenge bits of meat);¹⁸ and in the second half of *The Frogs*, Dionysus is on the other side of the line, as the patron god of comedy making jokes at the expense of others. This ambivalence is implicit in the *Bacchae*, where he is at first the object not of scatological laughter (as in *The Frogs*) but of the angry sarcasm of Pentheus; then, as the tide turns, the sinister smile of Dionysus, god of comedy, becomes cruelly fixed as he treats Pentheus as a ribald fool, a βωμολόχος haunting the altar. Thus the mockery of the god may appear on one level as a sophisticated bit of blasphemy, a theatrical naughtiness; but on another level it is a traditional part of the worship of any god of fertility, and must be taken in deadly earnest.¹⁹ The mockery of the phallic god is at the very heart of the Indian myth, to which we will now turn.

ŚIVA IN THE MYTHS OF DAKṢA'S SACRIFICE AND THE PINE FOREST

Although the myth of Dakṣa and the myth of the Pine Forest occur in isolation in Sanskrit texts, they are often explicitly linked.²⁰ Moreover, they may usefully be viewed as two variants of a single theme: the story of a maverick god who is not recognized, who visits those who deny him worship, is attacked by them, attacks them in turn, and is ultimately revealed to be god. Finally, these two myths together provide a more compelling and enriching parallel to the story of Dionysus than is presented by either of them alone.

I will tell the Indian myths in greater detail than I devoted to the Greek because they are not as well known, but, even so, it will be necessary to select and reduce the materials far more than in the case of the Greek. The Sanskrit tradition is far more rococo, in part as a result of the later date of the recorded text (the Sanskrit having had much more time to elaborate upon its stories) but more as a result of the innate verbosity of Indian myth

¹⁸ Grene's understanding of this comic figure is the basis of my own.

¹⁹ See O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 72–76.

²⁰ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 310–11.

and the exigencies of the fluid oral tradition: each variant omits details which it assumes (rightly) would be known to the general Indian audience but feels free to expand upon other details neglected in some versions. In selecting the details to tell for the purpose of this particular comparative study, I will flesh out the bare skeleton of the plot with those details that bear most directly upon the Greek materials. Other selections from the same data, highlighting other significant aspects of the myth, have been treated at length elsewhere.²¹ This version is taken from a single text, albeit a rather late one, the *Śiva Purāṇa*;²² in the analysis that follows, I will supplement it with variants from other texts.

The myth of the sacrifice of Dakṣa is framed by two partial multiforms presented as a prologue and an epilogue.

PROLOGUE: THE INCEST OF BRAHMĀ

Brahmā, the grandfather of the world, created Śiva and Dakṣa and commanded them to produce children. Dakṣa begat many daughters, whom he gave to various sages as wives, but Śiva at first remained chaste. When Brahmā created Dawn as his daughter, Kāma, the god of erotic love, inspired Brahmā and Dakṣa with lust for her. Śiva rebuked them for their shameful deeds, and from Dakṣa's sweat as he restrained himself was born a woman, Dakṣa's daughter Rati, whom he gave to Kāma to be his wife. Satī, another daughter of Dakṣa, was given to Śiva to be his wife.

THE SACRIFICE OF DAKṢA

One day, Dakṣa performed a sacrifice to which he did not invite Śiva, for he hated him, nor Satī (though she was dear to him), for she was Śiva's wife. When Śiva refused to attend the sacrifice, since he had not been invited, Satī insisted on going there without him. After she arrived, she rebuked the sages who were there, but Dakṣa continued to revile Śiva and to look upon Satī with hate. In anger and humiliation, Satī killed herself by burning her body in the fire of her own power of yoga.

When Śiva learned of this, he tore out a cluster of his matted hair, from which a horrible demon named Virabhadra was born. He instructed Virabhadra to burn up the sacrifice of Dakṣa and

²¹ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 111–40; *Origins of Evil*, pp. 272–320; and *Hindu Myths: A Sourcebook* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), pp. 25–34, 116–25, 137–49 (hereafter cited as *Hindu Myths*); see also J. Bruce Long, "Dakṣa: Divine Embodiment of Creative Skill," *History of Religions* 17, no. 1 (August 1977): 29–60.

²² *Śiva Purāṇa* (Benares: Paṇḍita-Pustakālaya, 1964), 2.2.1–43; 4.12.

all who were there. The demon and his demonic throng seized the sacrifice, which had taken the form of a wild animal to flee, and beheaded it; they mutilated other gods, outraged the goddesses, and polluted the sacrificial fire with excrement and filth. Then Virabhadra found Dakṣa hiding in terror behind the altar; he dragged him out, cut off his head, and threw it into the fire.

Brahmā and the other gods went to Śiva and praised him, begging him to restore Dakṣa and all the others, and promising to give him a share in the sacrifice. Śiva restored them all, giving Dakṣa the head of a goat, the sacrificial animal. Dakṣa arose and rejoiced; though he had hated Śiva in the past, his mind was now clear. At first, his passion and longing for his departed daughter kept him from praising Śiva, but then, in shame and humility, he praised Śiva and bowed low before him. And Śiva gave Dakṣa permission to complete his sacrifice, in which a full share was given to Śiva.

EPILOGUE: THE CASTRATION IN THE PINE FOREST

Sages lived in the Pine Forest with their wives. One day, Śiva took on a disguise to test them: he came there naked, holding his penis in his hand and making lewd gestures. Some of the sages' wives were terrified; others flocked to him, embracing him and pushing one another aside. When the sages saw what was happening, they exploded in fury, shouting at him, "Who are you? Since you are violating Vedic law, let your penis fall to the ground." When they said this, Śiva's penis fell down and moved down into hell and up into heaven and all over the earth, never remaining still for a moment and burning everything everywhere it went, like a great fire. The gods and sages, who still did not recognize Śiva, asked Brahmā to help them; he advised them to ask Pārvatī to take the form of the vagina to hold the penis of Śiva, and to worship him in that form. The sages propitiated Pārvatī and the bull-bannered Śiva, and Pārvatī held the penis and kept it calm, and all the worlds rejoiced.

PATTERNS OF REPETITION IN THE INDIAN CYCLE

Before comparing the Greek and Indian materials, let us compare the separate parts of the Indian text to show how they function as a unit.

The prologue establishes certain paradigms that persist in the later episodes of the myth. The explicit incest of Brahmā pre-

figures the later, implicit incest of Dakṣa. Both Brahmā and Dakṣa are punished by Śiva for their incest, as Śiva himself will be reviled and punished by Dakṣa and the Pine Forest sages for his untamed eroticism. In the text I have cited, Brahmā is merely rebuked, but in other variants of the myth more ancient, numerous, and famous than this one, Brahmā takes the form of an animal to pursue his daughter, who has also taken the form of an animal, and Śiva beheads him as he flees.²³ So, too, in other variants, Dakṣa's incestuous relationship with Satī is far more explicit,²⁴ and even in the present text, Dakṣa admits that he had only given Satī to Śiva to marry because Brahmā had made him do it. Thus, Brahmā and Dakṣa are aspects of a single figure.

A more complex identification links Śiva and Kāma. Śiva, the ascetic, is apparently opposed to Kāma; in other variants, he burns him up and revives him again even as he destroys and restores Dakṣa and the sages. Yet both Śiva and Kāma marry daughters of Dakṣa, and in the epilogue in the Pine Forest, Śiva plays an erotic role, inspiring lust in the sages as Kāma inspires lust in Brahmā and Dakṣa, and inspiring anger in them as Kāma inspires anger in Śiva. Śiva and Kāma share the generally "Dionysian" trait of blatant eroticism; but Śiva's symbolism extends to include a far more complex cluster of Dionysian qualities, such as his androgyny and his role as a dancer.

Though Kāma is occasionally said to be an androgyne (to be born with his wife as half of him rather than to receive her from Dakṣa),²⁵ the androgyne is far more closely associated with the other male figures in the prologue. Brahmā is often said to be an androgyne, who creates many creatures from his thigh as a womb.²⁶ In imitation of Brahmā, Dakṣa is also an androgyne; he also scorns Śiva for this very quality, for Śiva is by far the most important Hindu androgyne, sharing his body with his wife—Satī or Pārvatī.²⁷ The problem of androgyny demonstrates the degree to which the conflict between Dakṣa and Śiva is based not only upon their opposition (mortal vs. god, father-in-law vs. son) but upon their identity (two creative androgynes, both sexually attracted to the same woman).

The central episode, the sacrifice of Dakṣa, is tied to the Pine

²³ *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.33–34; *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.1–6; see O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 25–35.

²⁴ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 128–30.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–72, 117–18.

²⁶ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 334–35; *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 311–14.

²⁷ O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 314–34.

Forest epilogue in several ways, primarily through the motif of heresy and redemption. During the argument at the sacrifice, Dakṣa claims that he has excluded Śiva because Śiva is an outcaste and a heretic, a violator of proper rituals, insane, without known parents; he also accuses Śiva of more orgiastic forms of heterodoxy: Śiva dances and wanders about naked, frenzied by drugs. But Dakṣa then goes on to curse Śiva in such a way that apparently imposes upon Śiva from that moment the very habits for which Dakṣa has already condemned him: Śiva is to be beyond the pale of the sacrifice, shunned by all society, and to have no share of the sacrifice with the other gods (the very justification that Dakṣa has already cited as his reason for not having invited Śiva in the first place).²⁸

This complex curse, self-begetting and self-fulfilling, is then extended: Dakṣa curses all the followers of Śiva so that they will be heretics and drinkers of wine, expelled from Vedic rituals; in response, Nandin, the priest of Śiva, proclaims that since Dakṣa and his followers did not know Śiva, they would become lustful Brahmins in the thrall of anger and pride. These two groups of sages, cursed by Dakṣa and Nandin, are the lustful and angry heretic sages of the Pine Forest, as is made explicit in several other versions of the myth that emphasize their emotions, their heresy, and the cause of these flaws: the curses given at the sacrifice of Dakṣa.²⁹ This simple causation is inverted, like the curse given to Śiva himself (cursing him to be what he has been), when Sati tells the sages at Dakṣa's sacrifice to treat Śiva with respect, for (she reminds them) when Śiva wandered into the Pine Forest, disguised as a beggar, and the sages cursed him, Śiva burnt the entire universe with his disembodied phallus. Thus the sacrifice of Dakṣa is both the cause and the result of the encounter in the Pine Forest.

The particular detail that Sati chooses with which to remind the sages of that encounter forms yet another link between the two episodes: it is the motif of castration. In several texts describing Śiva's attack on Brahmā or Dakṣa, he is said to mutilate the gods: he cuts off Sarasvatī's nose, knocks out Pūṣan's teeth, tears out Bhaga's eyes, and rips off Bhṛgu's moustache; in yet another text,

²⁸ A similar dislocation of time and causation appears in other versions of the story of Dakṣa, in which Dakṣa argues that he will not invite Śiva to the sacrifice because Śiva carries a skull—the head of Brahmā, a multiform of the very head of Dakṣa that Śiva is about to cut off as a result of not being invited to the sacrifice because he carries a skull. . . ; see O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 277–86.

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 272–30.

he is said to cut off the testicles of Kratu, the embodiment of the sacrifice.³⁰ Later, Kratu is restored along with everyone else, just as (in the myth on which this episode is based), Indra is castrated and then given the testicles of a ram, more potent than those he had lost.³¹ The parallels between these mutilations and the beheading of Dakṣa, restored with a goat's head, need not be labored. But the explicit parallel comes in the epilogue, when Śiva himself is castrated and restored and, in some variants,³² makes the sages temporarily impotent until they restore his phallus and worship it.

In other variants of the Pine Forest myth, Śiva is not castrated; instead, he dances with the wives of the sages and, when the sages attack him, he continues to whirl their weapons up in his dance and to whirl them into flame even as his penis bursts into flame in our version of the story. This incident is, in turn, an echo of yet another episode in our text, a version of the encounter between Śiva and Dakṣa, in which Śiva appears as a dancer before the parents of the girl he wishes to marry (Pārvatī, a reincarnation of Satī). He enchants all the women in the city, including Pārvatī's mother, but when Pārvatī's parents then attempt to throw him out, he blazes up like a fire and then vanishes, leaving the parents full of devotion to the dancer, whom they now recognize as the god Śiva.³³ Here, as in the sacrifice of Dakṣa, the parents resist their daughter's marriage to Śiva; he appears as a destructive fire and is recognized as a god. And, as in the Pine Forest, the erotic dancer enchants the women, is attacked, vanishes, and is finally recognized. In all three of these episodes, the male figures attempt to protect their women from Śiva; they mock and attack him; he destroys them with fire and is finally worshiped.

PATTERNS IN THE INDIAN AND GREEK MYTHS

Both the Greek and the Indian texts are metamorphoses, myths about myths, and, more particularly, myths about rituals. The Greek

³⁰ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8; *Varāha Purāṇa* 33.4–34; see O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 116–18, 122–25.

³¹ *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 12.7.1.10–12, 5.2.3.8; the link between this myth and the restorations of Śiva and Dakṣa is right in the text: "Indra lost his virility. The gods used the ram, the male goat, and the bull as recompense. And therefore the bull is sacred to Indra." In later texts, Indra is given the testicles of a ram alone (*Rāmāyaṇa* 1.48.1–10; *Mahābhārata* 12.329.14.1–2; *Padma Purāṇa* 1.56.15–53); see O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 133–34; *Hindu Myths*, pp. 94–96.

³² Versions recorded by Wilford and Sonnerat, cited in O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 181, 184.

³³ *Śiva Purāṇa* 2.3.30; for Śiva as the dancer, see also O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 130–48.

texts deal with the Bacchic rites and the theatre of Dionysus; the Sanskrit with the Vedic sacrifice, the offerings to Śiva, and the worship of the phallus. There are disquieting transitions from life to ritual and back: the mortal opposes the god on an official ritual level, but the god then uses his ritual in a personal and sadistic way, until the mortal is catapulted back into the public ritual.

The self-awareness of the myth produces a kind of play within a play. The *Bacchae* demonstrates how Dionysus lures Pentheus into participating not only in the ritual but in the myth about the ritual, the myth that Pentheus does not believe in: the myth of the substitute birth and the substitute victim. In *The Frogs*, the dramatic poets discuss at great length the truth or falsehood of the myths in their plays and, on the other hand, the effects that these myths have upon real life.³⁴ In the course of Dakṣa's sacrifice, Sati narrates the story of the Pine Forest though it has not yet occurred, and Dakṣa scorns Śiva for having an epithet that he will receive only as a result of what Dakṣa is about to do. Both cycles, therefore, are about the way that myths become real to people who do not want to believe in them.

The particular myths that become real in our texts depict the way in which mortals learn to accept their own human nature, though they may at first deny it; through intimate contact with those who embody the extremes of that nature, among gods and animals, they learn the ways in which they do and do not differ from gods who are animals. We have seen these patterns at play in the Greek texts, and the Indian points of comparison are patent. Dakṣa first denies his bestiality by suppressing his eroticism, which bursts out to become Rati, the wife of the god of erotic love; he then channels his excessive love for his other daughter, Sati, into his hatred of her husband, the god; when this, too, bursts out in the sacrifice, Dakṣa is literally transformed into the beast he always was. So, too, the Pine Forest sages deny their eroticism and (therefore) misunderstand their god until they are forced to acknowledge their passion and his.³⁵ To accept Śiva as god, therefore, is to cease to regard oneself as a god, above human passions and scornful of passionate gods, in order to begin the ritual by which one hopes to tame one's own animal nature.

³⁴ For a discussion of this argument, see Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, "Inside and Outside the Mouth of God: The Boundary between Myth and Reality," *Daedalus* (Spring 1980), pp. 93–105.

³⁵ O'Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, pp. 307–10; *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 172–210; see also Richard L. Brubaker, "Lustful Woman, Chaste Wife, Ambivalent Goddess: A South Indian Myth," *Anima* 3 (1977): 59–62, for a discussion of the sage's projection of his own suppressed lust.

Pentheus and Dakṣa are wrong about themselves in the same way that they are wrong about the god; as they do not know themselves, they do not know him. They think they are better than they are, and they think he is worse than he is; they project onto him the qualities that they cannot accept in themselves. It is surely significant that in both sets of myths the god is falsely accused of licentiousness; some of his more extreme actions seem expressly designed to *épater les bourgeois*, to make people think that he is worse than he is. The injustice of the accusations made against the god is affirmed by Euripides' insistence, in the solemn choruses of the Bacchae, on the deadly serious, sacred rather than sensual nature of the joy and ecstasy in the mountains; and it is affirmed in the myths of the Pine Forest by repeated straightforward statements of the fact that Śiva did not seduce the women, though their husbands thought he did.³⁶

The courting of such a false accusation is part of the cult of the Pāśupatas,³⁷ a sect of worshipers of Śiva represented both by Śiva himself (who enters the Pine Forest in the form of a Pāśupata, one of his own worshipers, as Dionysus pretends to be his own priest) and by the sages, who are taught to be Pāśupatas in some variants of the myth. The Pāśupata was chaste, but he would act as if he were not, so that everyone would say, "This is no man of chastity; this is a lecher." And by this false accusation, he would transfer to them all of his accumulated sins (his bad karma) and take from them their merits (their good karma).³⁸ By his erotic appearance and gestures, his nakedness, ithyphallicism, and dancing, Śiva excites the women and infuriates their husbands, but he himself does not actually do anything wrong. He eggs them on to misjudge him and attack him, so that he can exorcise their suppressed feelings and give them his forgiveness in a spirit of love greater than before, like lovers reunited after a quarrel.

The confrontation between the worshipers and the god is set forth in the form of three problematic sexual encounters: the hierogamy (marriage with the god), the incestuous impulse, and the transformation into a sexual animal. Though they are

³⁶ O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 172–83; *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 185–98, 273–75.

³⁷ Numerous correspondences between the Pāśupatas and the Cynics are surely relevant to this discussion, though perhaps distracting from the main points of the analysis; see Daniel H. H. Ingalls, "Cynics and Pāśupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor," *Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 4 (October 1962): 282–98.

³⁸ *Pāśupata Sūtra*, with the commentary of Kaundinya, Trivandrum Sanskrit Series 143 (Trivandrum, 1940), 3.6–19; see Ingalls, pp. 287–91; and O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, p. 183.

inextricably related, we have attempted to separate them in the Greek sources and will continue the attempt in the Sanskrit.

The hierogamy in the Greek myth takes the form of an explicit challenge to the myth of the birth of Dionysus from a mortal woman and an immortal male; the explicit parallel to this in the Sanskrit is the problem that Dakṣa sees in marrying his daughter Satī to Śiva. Although Dakṣa and Satī are technically nonhumans, they are not in fact immortals (both of them die in the course of the myth, though they are revived), and the relationship of Satī to Śiva is the very paradigm of the relationship of the worshiper to the god, for Satī is the good wife (the “suttee”) who cannot live without her husband and whose action in this myth establishes the precedent for the immolation of widows; she is the very model of the woman who regards her husband as a god.³⁹ On this level, Cadmus and Semele would be the counterparts of Dakṣa and Satī; in fact, however, this is not the case. As we have seen, the central triangle in the Greek myth is Pentheus, Agaue, and Dionysus—the mortal, his mother, and the god—while in India, the triangle of Dakṣa, Satī, and Śiva is that of the mortal, his daughter, and the god.

This contrast has been noted in another context: the oedipal conflict in Greece is that of child, parent, and parent’s spouse, while in India it is parent, child, and child’s spouse.⁴⁰ In both of the myths that concern us, the mortal who opposes the god is of the same generation as the god and is, moreover, technically either his brother (Śiva and Dakṣa both being born of Brahmā) or his cousin (Dionysus and Pentheus born of two sisters, daughters of Cadmus). Cadmus and Brahmā are the grandfathers in both myths, and are literally addressed as such. So, too, the sisters of the female protagonists play the same role in both myths, siding with the mortal male against the god and being punished for this (along with the female protagonist herself): the sisters of Agaue and Semele become the Bacchae, driven to madness, and the sisters of Satī, who attend the sacrifice without her (a circumstance that, in some variants, is what finally piques Satī’s indignation and envy to the point where she disobeys Śiva and

³⁹ O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 88–122.

⁴⁰ This formulation, which is A. K. Ramanujan’s, is sketched out in his “The Indian Oedipus,” in *Indian Literature: Proceedings of a Seminar*, ed. Arabinda Podder (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1972), pp. 127–37. I am indebted to Ramanujan for discussing with me a more fully developed exposition of this hypothesis, which he will publish soon. See also Robert P. Goldman, “Fathers, Sons, and Gurus: Oedipal Conflict in the Sanskrit Epics,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 6 (1978): 325–92.

goes to the sacrifice without him), are among the goddesses and women mutilated by Śiva and his minions (mutilation of women, such as the cutting off of the nose, normally being the sentence for promiscuity). The sisters represent a kind of judgment by society as a whole against the antisocial god, the transgressor of boundaries.

The problem of the mortal's relationship with the god is thus given sexual overtones as it falls into step with the problem of the mortal's relationship with mortal women in his family. The danger of union with the god is the danger of reaching out to someone too far away; the danger of incest is the danger of succumbing to the temptation of someone too close.⁴¹ These themes reinforce one another and are further highlighted by the third strand of this complex, the problem of the mortal who ignores and therefore is overwhelmed by his identity as an animal, a creature simultaneously symbolic of divinity and sexuality.⁴²

We have seen how Pentheus is made to recognize the bull-god by becoming an animal himself—the bull, lion, and snake that are Dionysus's triple identity (*Bacchae* 1017)—and by being beheaded like an animal. All Hindu gods are closely tied to animals through their vehicles (*vahanas*), the animals that “carry” them both literally, in iconography, and in the sense that whenever one encounters one of these animals one is encountering a mascot and embodied form of the god. In addition to this general theology of gods as animals, Śiva is the god particularly regarded as the god of animals, and most particularly associated with three animals that correspond to the Dionysian troika: bull, lion (or tiger), and snake. Śiva is often mocked (by Dakṣa and by others) for riding on a bull, wearing a tiger skin (the equivalent of Dionysus's fawn skin/lion skin), and being draped in snakes.

Unlike Pentheus, Dakṣa is not transformed into any of the animals that represent the god he denies; but, like Pentheus, he is transformed into the sacrificial animal, the goat. Tigers or lions were never sacrificed in India; snakes appear in myths as sacrificial animals only in the inverted sacrifice that frames the true sacrifice in the *Mahābhārata*;⁴³ and though bulls were once sacrificed in

⁴¹ These dangers combine in the Rg Vedic dialogue between Yama and Yami (10.10), in which Yama rejects the sexual advances of Yami both because she is too close (his sister) and too distant (a goddess); see O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 176–77, 182–84; *Hindu Myths*, pp. 62–65; and cf. Robert P. Goldman, “Mortal Man and Immortal Woman: An Interpretation of Three Ākhyāna Hymns of the Rg Veda,” *Journal of the Oriental Institute of Baroda* 18 (1969): 273–303.

⁴² The animal is also symbolic of incest, according to the Freudians; see O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 204–8.

⁴³ *Mahābhārata* 1.13–53.

ancient India, the taboo on killing cattle had put a halt to this ritual long before our myth was recorded.⁴⁴ When Dakṣa is sacrificed, therefore, he is transformed into a goat.

This goat is, however, strongly symbolic of several of the gods in the Dakṣa myth. In most variants of the prologue, Brahmā takes the form of a series of animals (horse, bull, goat, ram) to commit incest with his daughter, who has assumed the forms of mare, cow, nanny goat, and ewe.⁴⁵ When Śiva pursues Brahmā, Brahmā flees in the form of a beast to escape, but Śiva succeeds in beheading him.⁴⁶ The goat, as quintessential sacrificial animal in post-Vedic Hinduism, is the “vehicle” of Agni, god of fire and patron of the priest who tends the sacred fire; as Śiva absorbs much of the mythology of Agni, the goat is his animal, too, appropriate to Śiva, as to Agni, for its reputation for lechery as well as its sacred role. Moreover, the goat is specifically associated with castration and with the bull, as we have seen.

The beastly nature of Dakṣa’s sexuality and of his hatred of Śiva is underlined by one variant of the myth of the sacrifice, in which Dakṣa receives from the Goddess a magic garland. He places it upon his bed and becomes so excited by its perfume that he makes love that night in the manner of a mere beast; because of this evil, Dakṣa began to hate Śiva and even Satī.⁴⁷ But it is the beastly nature of Śiva that is most closely tied to the myth of Dakṣa’s sacrifice. For underlying this myth is yet another ancient cycle in which the gods exclude Śiva from the sacrifice and divide the beasts among themselves; when Śiva beheads the sacrificial beast, the gods give him a portion of the sacrifice and proclaim him lord of beasts, slayer of cattle.⁴⁸ The gods mutilated and deformed at the sacrifice say that they have been reduced to the condition of beasts; when they humble themselves before Śiva, and agree to be his beasts, and to make him lord of beasts (Paśupati), he agrees to restore them all, reminding them that he had deformed them because they were like “beasts” in failing to recognize his divinity.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 241–55.

⁴⁵ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.4; see O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, p. 82.

⁴⁶ *Āitareya Brāhmaṇa* 13.9–10; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8; cf. O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 111–41; *Origins of Evil*, p. 274; *Hindu Myths*, pp. 116–18.

⁴⁷ *Devībhāgavata Purāṇa* 7.30.27–50; see O’Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 249–51.

⁴⁸ *Gopatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.1.2; *Tāṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa* 7.9.16; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.4.1–8; *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* 4.2.12; see O’Flaherty, *Origins of Evil*, p. 171, 274.

⁴⁹ *Varāha Purāṇa* 33.3–24.

Dakṣa's sacrifice is a reenactment of the first encounter of the gods with the beast-god Śiva *in illo tempore*, collapsed into the present moment for Dakṣa. The "sacrifice of Dakṣa" is a theological pun, a sacrifice that Dakṣa thinks is "by" Dakṣa, but that he comes to learn is "made of" Dakṣa, when he substitutes for the sacrificial beast. The animal head that he is given in the end is his true head; the human one was a mistake, an illusion that he arrogantly accepted as reality. In getting the goat's head, Dakṣa comes home at last to his true nature.⁵⁰

In the Pine Forest, the sages do not actually become animals, but they are bound up with the cult of Śiva as Lord of Beasts, Paśupati. At the end of the encounter, Śiva teaches them the merits of the worship of Paśupati; at the same time, he teaches them to worship him in the form of a phallus, the *liṅga*. Their acceptance of Śiva as Lord of Beasts and Lord of the Phallus is an acknowledgment of their own nature as animals, subject to lust like all animals, rather than as sages who think that they can cast out lust and anger merely by withdrawing into the forest.

The Greek and Indian myths are part of a larger corpus of stories in which deities who are resisted punish those who do not believe in them. Throughout Indo-European mythology we encounter the story of the intrusion of a charismatic god into a routinized cult.⁵¹ The theme of the denial of the orgiastic god in India may be traced back to the *Rg Veda*, where Indra, a phallic god and a dancer, a counterpart of Zeus and an antecedent of Śiva,⁵² is challenged: "He about whom they ask, 'Where is he?',"

⁵⁰ An interesting example of this is the Vedic myth of Dadhyañc. Originally a horse, Dadhyañc had the form of a sage when the Ásvins asked him to tell them the secret of the elixir of immortality. They gave him (back) a horse head, removing his human head; he told them the secret with that head; Indra, jealous of the elixir, cut off the head, and the Ásvins (themselves horse-headed gods) restored Dadhyañc's human head. The true head, of Dadhyañc as of the Ásvins, is the horse head, that has the knowledge of immortality, though the central transition (human to horse) is here framed with two inversions (horse to human, before the myth begins, and back to human at the end). See O'Flaherty, *Hindu Myths*, pp. 56–60.

⁵¹ This corpus can be traced in Stith Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, 6 vols., rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58). Motif C 50, "Tabu: offending the gods"; C 57, "Neglect of service to deity," subdivided into "Neglect of sacrifice to deity," "Fraudulent sacrifice," and "Punishment for having refused to take part in Bacchic rites" (only attested in Greece, not surprisingly). Other relevant themes are A 173.2, "Gods imprisoned"; A 177.1, "God as dupe or trickster"; and Q 221.1, "Discourtesy to god punished." Still other motifs from the cycle seem to be distributed beyond Indo-European bounds: K 1811, "Gods in disguise visit mortals"; K 1301, "Mortal woman seduced by a god"; T 111.1, "Marriage of a mortal and a god"; Q 552.1.7, "Woman who accuses saint of raping her is struck by lightning"; and Q 552.1.8, "Infidel defies god to strike him with lightning. God does." See also tale type 939, "The offended deity."

⁵² O'Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 84–89.

or they say of him, the monstrous one, 'He does not exist,' . . . He, my people, is Indra."⁵³ So too, the Greeks referred to, "Zeus, whoever he may be."⁵⁴ These are traces of the more general myth of denial and acceptance. What is apparently peculiar to the Dionysus/Śiva corpus is the complex pattern of interaction between the mortal, the god, the mother/daughter, and the animals.

CONCLUSION: THE HAPPY ENDING

In the film *Never on Sunday*, the good-hearted Greek prostitute (played by Melina Mercouri) gave happy endings to all the Greek tragedies; at the end of *Medea*, in her rendition, the children turn out to be alive after all, and everyone goes to the seashore. In Indian drama, too, there is no such thing as tragedy; all the potentially tragic motifs are twisted around and given happy endings. Thus in the *R̥g Veda*, the goddess Urvaśī cold-heartedly abandons her mortal lover, Purūravas, and replies with sarcasm to his agonized threats of suicide;⁵⁵ but when the playwright Kālidāsa gets ahold of the story, he has her return to him and live happily ever after, presumably going often to the seashore.⁵⁶

The *Bacchae* is a tragedy. At the end, all the human protagonists are destroyed, Pentheus horribly killed, all the others exiled, deformed, and condemned to live out the rest of their days haunted by the memory of the things the god made them do. The Indian myth, by contrast, ends with Dakṣa both restored and enlightened, the Pine Forest sages happily engrossed in their new cult. Pentheus remains unrelenting to the very end, like every bona fide Greek hero who challenges the gods, of whom Oedipus is perhaps the paradigmatic example;⁵⁷ and one suspects that Euripides sympathizes with Pentheus for this, as indeed for his deep revulsion toward the bloodcurdling excesses of the cult. Dakṣa and the Pine Forest sages repent of their evil ways, bow down before the new god, and are restored to life with powers and knowledge far greater than before, by the grace of the now-satisfied god. They are given a second chance, and they take it. The more literal-minded Greek tragedy cannot indulge in such a reversal or does not wish to do so; although a virtue of capital

⁵³ *R̥g Veda* 2.12.

⁵⁴ Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 160. And Pentheus says that the stranger, "Whoever he may be," commits *hubris* by saying that Dionysus is a god.

⁵⁵ *R̥g Veda* 10.95.

⁵⁶ Kālidāsa, *Vikramorvaśīya*.

⁵⁷ It is surely relevant in this context that Oedipus struggles not only with the gods but with his mother and with an animal who is half snake, half lion.

punishment, it has been suggested, is that it teaches you a lesson, this is a lesson that only a character in a Hindu myth can benefit from. Agaue is left alive at the end to realize the meaning of it all—who she is, how she is living, and what she has done—but as she never did resist the god (except, perhaps, by having once been one of the sisters of Semele who denied that Zeus was Semele's lover) she cannot be said to have been taught a lesson. She is merely a pawn that Dionysus picks up in order to destroy Pentheus and then discards.

Pentheus is never given a second chance. The lion's head that Agaue mistakes for his does not actually become his; it remains steadfastly, and gruesomely, a human head. When Dakṣa loses his head, the gods act on his behalf to anticipate his own ultimate contrition; they pray to Śiva for him, and Śiva makes the animal head become Dakṣa's own. This intervention turns the tide of the myth. So, too, in the Pine Forest, Brahmā and Pārvatī act on behalf of the sages to calm Śiva down and to bring him into a frame of mind in which he is willing to restore what he has destroyed. These interventions are made possible by the ritual and philosophical context of the Indian myth, embedded in a religion in which ritual makes all things possible, in which destruction is merely a prelude to re-creation, and every story has a happy ending.

Both the Greek and the Indian view of the relationship between man and god belong to the type of theodicy that Paul Ricoeur has characterized as "tragic": gods are jealous of men and oppose them when they seem to be too happy, or even too good.⁵⁸ Starting from this premise, however, the Greek and Indian myths develop in different directions, the one leading the hero deeper and deeper into the trap of arrogance and a doomed refusal to worship a god who behaves even worse than humans are supposed to do, the other allowing the hero to acknowledge the reality of the god even while he comes to know how truly awful the god is.

In this context, the mockery and torture of the god are tests of the mortal, not of the god; this is certainly how it appears from the point of view of the god and of the storyteller. These attacks are also forms of worship. Dakṣa could not perform a sacrifice against Śiva even when he tried, since, by "killing" the offending sacrifice Śiva was in fact performing it, acting as the sacrificial priest; similarly, the Pine Forest sages came to love Śiva more after he had baited them into attacking him. Pentheus became

⁵⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).

the victim of Dionysus in the ultimate (albeit unwilling) act of surrender and devotion. These passionate attitudes to the god are instances of that peculiar form of devotion known as “hate-love” in Sanskrit (*dveṣa-bhakti*) or German (*Hasslieb*). They demonstrate the irresistible, inescapable attraction of the god, whether or not one wants to worship him.⁵⁹ Since the god embodies passion and emotion, anger and lust, the worshiper whose anger or lust drives him to deny the god is by virtue of that very denial offering himself up as a victim in a sacrifice whose meaning he does not understand.

One crucial factor that distinguishes the Indian from the Greek myths is the storyteller’s attitude toward the god. Of course, seen from the standpoint of the god, neither of the myths is a tragedy; if one regards Dionysus and Śiva as the heroes, both are tales of happy triumph. But through mortal eyes it is difficult, though not impossible, to regard Dionysus as the hero of the *Bacchae*; yet it may be that we are intended to do so, disturbing though it may be. Certainly Dionysus is wronged, and for us, as for the *Bacchae*, there is an uncomfortable force of magnetism in his sinister powers. So too, it is difficult, though not impossible, to regard Pentheus as the hero. Despite his pomposity and cruelty, he is trying to do what he thinks to be right (and what Euripides may have thought right). It is precisely this ambivalence that lends subtlety as well as power to the play.

But there can be not a moment of hesitation in accepting Śiva as the hero of his myths. His gruesomeness is explicitly regarded as erotic in the Sanskrit tradition;⁶⁰ his cult would have been an accepted part of the life of anyone listening to the stories of these myths. Moreover, since Śiva is regarded as God, rather than as a god, his unsavory aspects are unequivocally creative. Dionysus’s smile is sinister and cruel; Śiva has a horselaugh (*aṭṭahāsa*) that is terrifying and destructive but that also vibrates in such a way as to create new life.⁶¹ Śiva is at once more cosmic and more banal than Dionysus; he destroys the universe at doomsday, but he is also henpecked by his wife Pārvatī.⁶² Features such as these tend to make the Indian worshiper both more reverent to him and more genuinely fond of him than the Greeks were toward Dionysus. That Pentheus never comes to understand the meaning

⁵⁹ O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 213–18; *Origins of Evil*, pp. 277–85.

⁶⁰ O’Flaherty, *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 236–50.

⁶¹ Cf. the creation of Gaṇeśa from Śiva’s laugh in *Varāha Purāṇa* 23.

⁶² O’Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes*, pp. 72–76; *Asceticism and Eroticism*, pp. 224–26.

of his sacrifice, while Dakṣa and the sages do, is as much a reflection of the difference in the minds of the particular authors of the texts in which these myths appear as it is a reflection of an important difference between the gods themselves. Perhaps it was the difference in the gods that made the Indians more willing than the Greeks to hear the myths from the god's point of view.

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